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PP RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHCHI #0061/01 1210330
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P R 010330Z MAY 09
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1034
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0081
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI 0006
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0011
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1116

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000061

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NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/30/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: KNU ON PEACE TALKS, POLITICAL GOALS, BORDER
SITUATION

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 49 (KNU SEEKS PRECONDITIONS)
[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 45 (THAI MEDIATION EFFORTS)
[1](#)C. CHIANG MAI 37 (KNU UNDER INCREASED PRESSURE)

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Chief, Pol/Econ, CG Chiang Mai.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary and Comment

[1](#)1. (C) The Karen National Union (KNU), which has been in a protracted military conflict with the Burmese regime, has two preconditions for peace talks with the GoB: the talks must be held in a third country, and the KNU must negotiate with a regime leader. The KNU wants to see the establishment of a federal system in Burma; and has again been allowed to base itself in Thailand, according to its Vice Chairman David Tharckabaw. He characterized Thai FM Kasit's intentions as a facilitator as "sincere," but made it clear he views the Burmese regime's overture to the KNU as nothing more than a ploy designed to enhance its international legitimacy. Tharckabaw also sought U.S. financial support for the KNU to travel to possible talks, for reuniting the various Karen splinter groups, and for continuing the KNU's armed resistance. The recent attack on the KNU carried out by the Burma Army and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA -- a pro-GoB armed group) may have a negative impact on Thailand's efforts to bring the two sides to the negotiating table. End Summary and Comment.

Two Preconditions

[1](#)2. (C) On April 29, we met with KNU Vice Chairman David Tharckabaw, who clarified the KNU only has two real preconditions for peace talks with the Burmese regime: the talks must be held in a third country, and the KNU must negotiate directly with an SPDC leader. Tharckabaw named Thailand, East Timor and Norway as possible negotiating venues, and confirmed what we reported in Ref A -- namely that either Burmese PM Thein Sein or General Thura Shwe Mann would be acceptable interlocutors. Tharckabaw noted that East Timor might be problematic as a host country from the GoB's point of view because he has heard rumors the self-proclaimed Burmese Government in Exile (NCGUB, or National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma) is on the verge of opening an office there. Norway, he said, has not played a role in the talks so far, but

Tharckabaw emphasized its prior mediation roles in other conflicts and said he believes the door is open for Norway to participate/host.

13. (C) Tharckabaw characterized Thai FM Kasit's efforts to facilitate talks with the GoB as "sincere," but expressed fear Kasit might try to pressure the KNU to accept less than a just peace later on. The regime, on the other hand, is only using the possibility of talks as a ploy, he opined. What the GoB really wants, he said, is KNU endorsement of and participation in the 2010 elections, which he was adamant the KNU would not provide. For the regime, the talks are nothing more than a ploy to enhance its legitimacy, he added, noting that the KNU and the GoB have tried on five previous occasions to reach a peace deal.

What About During the Talks?

14. (C) Tharckabaw made it clear that if the regime accepts the two preconditions mentioned above, direct talks could begin. During the negotiations, he said the KNU expects the regime to observe a nationwide ceasefire, to withdraw its troops in Karen areas from mountainous camps near villages to main roads, and not to use the ceasefire to tacitly expand its economic influence in Karen areas, i.e. by taking over land or additional mining concessions. As for the KNU's goal, he said a more permanent ceasefire could be achieved. He admitted, however, that there was an internal rift within the KNU that needed to be addressed. Some members want to see talks go ahead, even if the regime does not observe a nationwide cease fire, he said. This group, he opined, is mainly concerned with what the Karen people will get out of the process. Tharckabaw's faction on the other hand would like to see the talks lead to more momentous changes that could have an impact across the country, and is less flexible (see para 5 below). The KNU is discussing this issue while it waits to hear from FM Kasit regarding the GoB's

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response to its two preconditions, he stated.

Broader Political Goals

15. (C) More broadly, Tharckabaw said that he and his supporters within the KNU want a federal, democratic system in Burma, with the existing seven administrative divisions declared to be states. As for the Irrawaddy Delta, it should be designated as a multiethnic State, he opined. The regime, on the other hand, wants to found what he called "The Fourth Burmese Empire," and perpetuate its rule. Though he fingered the SPDC as the root of all Burma's problems, Tharckabaw agreed that it could be part of a transitional government under the right conditions.

On The Border

16. (C) In response to our questions, Tharckabaw said that KNU leaders are once again residing in Mae Sot on the Thai side of the border. He said that the letter ordering them to leave Thailand (Ref C) came from a local military commander, and was not approved by the Thai Third Army Commander. The Army is not enforcing the February order, he stated, adding that KNU personnel are nonetheless keeping a low profile. He said the KNU's biggest concern right now is fear of political assassinations. (Note: KNU General Secretary Mahn Sha was gunned down in Mae Sot in February 2008).

17. (C) Tharckabaw was aware of the April 27 clash between the KNU and the DKBA and Burma Army (BA), though he did not have up-to-date information from KNU troops at the time of our meeting. He said that there had been 2-3 casualties on the KNU side, but that he did not have figures for the DKBA or BA, emphasizing he had to wait for radio intercepts to get those

statistics. Royal Thai Army and Thai Foreign Ministry contacts told Embassy Bangkok on April 29 that several Thai soldiers had been wounded in the fighting on April 28. According to them, the BA and DKBA launched a joint attack on a KNU base near the Thai border just opposite of Tak province on April 27. The battle resumed again on April 28, and two Thai soldiers from the Third Army patrolling the border were injured.

18. (C) According to the Thai Army, villagers from the nearby border town were evacuated to a monastery. The MFA indicated no official complaints have been filed by the Thai Embassy in Burma as result of this incident; the RTG believes that this issue can be resolved through the Regional Border Committee (RBC) mechanism that is already in place. The next meeting is scheduled for July.

What Can the U.S. Do?

19. (C) Tharckabaw made three requests of us during our April 29 meeting, namely that the U.S.:

-- provide financial support to the peace talks if they get underway by funding KNU travel to the venue;

-- help the KNU bring Karen splinter groups back into the fold; and

-- consider funding the KNU's armed resistance against the Burmese regime.

Financial support for the talks would not be necessary if they are held in Thailand, Tharckabaw noted, but could be if Norway or a third country far away from Burma was chosen as the venue. The DKBA, he opined, wants to rejoin the KNU, but the KNU does not have resources to provide DKBA soldiers with food and shelter. With financial support, he claimed the KNU could meet the basic needs of the DKBA, and that many DKBA soldiers would return. We told Tharckabaw that supporting the KNU's armed insurgency was not an option for the U.S.

110. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassies Bangkok and Rangoon.
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